

"TAKE POST!"

Newsletter of the
2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft
Regiment Association

April 1998

ALL ABOARD the 'Mauretania' — December 1940



*If you don't see yourself in this picture — check on page 11
there's a second chance — you might be among the fourteen other happy gunners!*

REUNION NOTICE

The Anzac Reunion will be held on **Friday, April 24, 1998**, from 12 noon until 3:30 pm (doors do not open before 11:30 am). The cost of Annual Subscription, lunch and drinks is **\$25**. Please see the enclosed notice regarding lunch arrangements.

The venue is the same as last year — the **Air Force Convention Centre, 4 Cromwell Rd, South Yarra**. (Access to the car park is from Cromwell Road).

John Campbell, Hon Secretary.

NOTICE OF MEETING

The **Annual General Meeting** will be held at the **Air Force Convention Centre, 4 Cromwell Road, South Yarra** at 11:45 am (doors do not open before 11:30 am), **April 24, 1998**. The AGM is held just prior to the Anzac reunion.

Members are reminded that nominations for Committee must be lodged with the Honorary Secretary 7 days before the meeting.

John Campbell, Hon Secretary.

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

Greetings to all! It was good to receive messages from so many during the year.

From *Stan Baker*, "have a great re-union". From *Alistair Dowling* and his mother, widow of *Bob Dowling* – both of whom attended our tree dedication, – "thanking the Association for the opportunity to attend, meet colleagues and talk of memories and times long ago. Very pleased that we now have a focal point of remembrance."

Elizabeth Eager, widow of *Laurence*, "always interested to receive *Take Post*". *Frank O'Toole*, "Have a happy day". *F C Scott*, "congratulations to *Cec Rae* for his great work for the Association". *T B Butler*, "kind regards to my old mate Cec".

George Clucas, "feeling my age, and my legs don't want to work". *Cliff Cullen*, "Regards to *Cec Rae*". *Len Morgan*, "reasonably fit, but eyes and legs a bother". *Ern Kerr*, "keeping in good health, regards to all".

Joyce Ritchie, daughter of the late *Lieutenant Colonel Hipworth*, "thanks for *Take Post*". *Alf Brisbane*, now 92, "grateful for *Take Post*, enjoyed the story of *Neil Anderson* and the Dirty Thirteen. (Only seven are left now)".

Ken Webster, "living it up at Noosa, appreciates *Take Post*". *Ron Walsh*, "once again AWL from the re-union". (Leave granted, he lives in Tasmania). *George Roberts*, "awaiting visitors to Gerang Gerung! *Blue Page* did call enroute to Adelaide. "Congrats to *Ron Bryant* and his helpers in producing *Take Post*".

Patricia Sullivan, widow of the late *Keith Sullivan*, "thanks for TP and regards to *Griff Weatherly*; his letters helped through bad days." *Marj Mason*, widow of *Bill*, "her granddaughter proudly wears Bill's medals on Anzac Day". *Jessie Esler*, widow of *J Esler*, "sends greetings to *Les Harris* and best wishes to all".

Last year's note in *Take Post* about *Beryl Hawkin's* grandson Simon graduating at Duntroon caused a long phone call from *Ida Worsley*, widow of *Frank Worsley* telling Beryl that *Ida's* grandson Adam had graduated at the same time. Previously neither grandson knew that their grandfathers had both been in our Regiment. *Ida* sends greetings to all she and Frank knew over the years. *Ida* keeps busy with Legacy and the RSL, and visiting her family which is scattered around Australia.

Barry Cassidy, son of *Bill*, "have written of my father's 4½ years as a POW." *Rod Smith*, son of the late *Richard Smith* wrote "I was pleasantly surprised to see my name amongst the jottings as attending the 1996 re-union. Being with my father's Regiment in the March was very rewarding; I will never forget it".

David Owen, "health did not permit attending the tree dedication".

Alan (Bussy) Read, "with memories of *Joe Oddy* and *Dud Gillespie* and their detour to Cairo when emerging from the desert". *Harry Sauerberg*, "appreciated the photo of Ink Troop in last TP". *Ted Sands* was also pleased to see his photo. *R A Paul* "thanks for the informative TP".

Greetings to all from *George Rutter*, *Arthur McLaren*, *Jim Bourke*, *Noel Moulton* and *David Owens*. Sick Parade – Their health is not so good but they send their best wishes:- *Terry Gleeson*, *Bert Stringer*, *Mac McGillivray* and *Hec Bird*.

**Keep sending in your news.
We don't want our Secretary's column
to be just a sick parade, but your mates
like to hear from you and about you.**

THE SENTRY'S LOG

Ralph Hawkey (8) reported in from Nathalia to let us know he's still battling on despite maladies affecting himself and family. At the Remembrance Day service in the Nathalia Gardens, the minister of his church was the guest speaker and used passages from our book "*On Target*", particularly those relating to *Ralph's* experiences. The service was delivered by St Mary's Secondary College supported by several schools from the district, as with last year when students sang favourite old wartime songs. The Veterans were pleased to have young people of the district taking an interest.

Another example of local youthful interest in the events of WW2 was demonstrated by *Ralph's* grandson *Josh* who prepared a school project on Grandpa *Ralph's* life from schooldays on. He recounted the story of *Ralph* and *Horry Beck* being shot during the retreat from Bnghazi, based on information in our book "*On Target*".

Jim Bourke has left his home in Katamatite and now lives at the Pioncers' Hospital, Numurkah. He has had minor strokes but soldiers on.

Eric Maxwell wrote to thank those members of the Regiment who helped him with information to reconstruct the diary of his father, the late *Vern Maxwell* of 8 Battery. If any of our members knew *Vern* well, *Eric* would appreciate you contacting him at PO Box 936, Croydon, 3136 or phone 9723 2267 (evenings please).

Neil Anderson from Murchison reports that *Berney Cheong* drove him and *Keith Gregory* to Wangaratta to the memorial service for *Alf Brisbane* who passed away at the age of 92 years. *Neil* says that *Jack Cassidy*, *Jim Russell* and *Jack Keane* are still about although perhaps creaking a little. As indicated by their VX numbers, all these boys joined the AIF together.

A TALE OF HEADS

by Peter Macgeorge (written while a POW)

On our way from Hobsons Bay,
In the good ship Mauretania,
I backed the head, much to the dread
Of those with tails mania.

The pennies flew, my profits grew,
I won with every spin,
And as we zigzagged o'er the sea,
My luck was really in.

And when we reached old Palestine,
And gazed across the water,
At restaurants and bright sarongs
Along the native quarter,

The order came that we could take
Six hours of leave till tea.
I looked around and found I wasn't
Short of company.

Old Jack was there, and Harry too,
As well as Frank and Ray.
"We'll help you see the town," they said,
"We'll help you spend your day".

But when about to file down
The gangway to the pier,
There came another order loud
That wasn't nice to hear.

"All leave is cancelled," were the words,
Much to our grief and sorrow,
"So back unto your hammocks, men,
"And wait until tomorrow."

Out came the pennies, up they went,
In all the two-up games,
And bright and rosy stayed our dreams,
Of alcohol and dames.

But luck was out, I couldn't win,
I failed every time,
And as the afternoon advanced,
I hardly had a dime.

"Switch off the heads," old Jack
called out,
As though in utter pain,
"Get on the tails, stops your wails,
"And give us hope again."

I made the switch but straight away
The sky was raining heads.
"I just can't judge it right," I said,
"My luck has gone to shreds."

Then Frank called out to alternate
Each single bet I had.
"That way you'll win at times," he said.
"Things won't be quite so bad."

I tried that too, but still no good,
My luck was all astray,
And by the time the game was done,
Our dreams in tatters lay.

"You should have stopped," was
Ray's lament,
"As soon as you were losing.
"Now we'll have to stay on board,
"Instead of going boozing."

"Please don't blame me, I told them
all,
"The Army is the one.
"If it hadn't stopped us taking leave,
"Think what we could have done!

"I've lost the money that I made,
"It's all gone down the drain."
So back we went to mess fatigue
And peeling spuds again.

The Army is so heartless,
It cares not any more,
For soldiers dreams and all their
schemes,
To help them win the war.

★★★★★

AT THE 1997 ANZAC REUNION



Back (L-R): Bert Baglin (7), Bill Carson (7), Ray Everlyn (9), Cec Rae (9)
Front (L-R): Brian Layton (7), Dave Humphries (7), John Bright (8), Roy Thomson (7)

DEDICATION OF THE REGIMENTAL TREE

Sunday, May 4, 1997, at the Shrine of Remembrance.

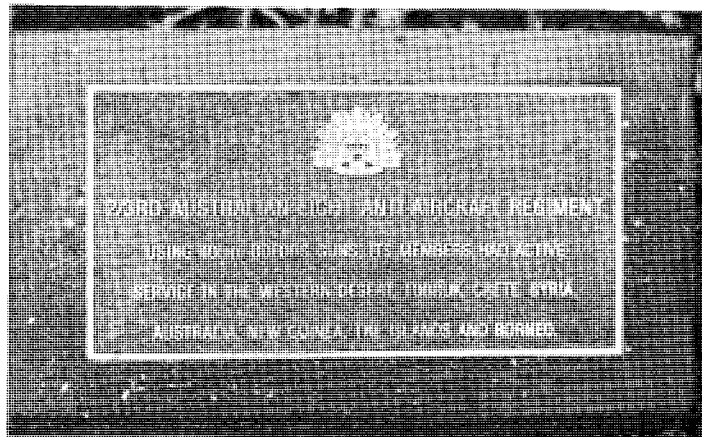
As foretold in our 1997 Newsletter, a Simon Poplar Tree at the Shrine of Remembrance Gardens was dedicated to the memory of our Regiment and its members on May 4, 1997. Despite some rain and blustery weather, members of the Regiment, their partners and some widows of old comrades appreciated the ceremony.

The President, Cec Rae, welcomed Shrine Trustees Commodore D H D Smyth and Lieutenant Colonel A J Lombardo, the Chaplain of Southern Region Reverend Des Lowe, Shrine guards and Association members and friends. The President gave a brief resume of the Regiment's service then unveiled a bronze plaque at the tree. The dedication and blessing was performed by the Reverend Des Lowe.

A poem, especially written for the occasion by Mrs Constance Little, was read by Ron Bryant, the Ode was presented by John Campbell, then the Last Post and Reveille were played to complete an impressive ceremony.

Refreshments were provided at the nearby Travel Lodge where an opportunity was given to meet old friends and their partners.

On your next visit to the Shrine, look out for our tree and plaque – on the St Kilda Road edge of the Shrine Gardens nearly opposite Dorcas Street.



The Plaque on 2/3 LAA Regimental Tree

A TRIBUTE TO THE REGIMENTAL TREE

May this Upright Poplar Tree
Grow in Strength, and graceful be
Strong, against the wind and gales,
May it stand when all else fails
Tree of Honor – and of Truth,
Tree of Memory, and of Youth.
Bless all those who gather here.
Hearts uplifted with Good Cheer
And, to all those “passing by”
May they hear the “Silent Cry”,
“Peace – Sweet Peace, to all the World”
Let the Flag fly, free, unfurled
Dear Mates, passed beyond Life's climb,
Know This Tree, is *Yours* (and mine).

(This tribute to the Regimental Tree was written by Mrs Constance Little, widow of Charles G Little, 8th Battery).

“On Target”

All copies of our Unit History, the book “On Target” have been sold. We receive occasional enquiries from members of

families of deceased comrades seeking a copy of the book. If any widows or families have no further use for their book, we would appreciate return of any copy which can be passed on to others. Please advise John Campbell, our Hon Secretary if you would like to dispose of such a copy.



The Dedication of the Regimental Tree in the grounds of the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance.

Sheltered from the rain by our President Cec Rae and Hon Secretary John Campbell, the Reverend Des Lowe dedicates and blesses our Simon Poplar Regimental Tree on May 4, 1997.

Two Shrine guards attended the ceremony.

THE HOSPITAL SHIP 'Manunda'

This account, written by Mrs Barbara Kilgour, during WW2 a nursing sister on the 'Manunda', has been forwarded by John Ballantine of 9th Battery, with her permission.

Our 'Home' repaired:

We were able to return to our ship on August 16, 1942 and were pleased to find her looking normal again.

Our ship 2/1 Australian Hospital Ship *Manunda* had been 'home' for a number of us for over two years. The last time we had seen her was six months ago. She was tied up to a wharf in Adelaide with a swarm of workmen stripping away a lot of damaged steel plates and woodwork, the result of the direct hit and near miss we had received in Darwin after the raid by the Japanese Air Force on February 19th, 1942.

The near miss had put seventy-six holes along the side and the direct hit had exploded dead centre behind the bridge and did a lot of damage to that part of the ship – one ward, purser's office, stairs and staff cabins; killed twelve people and caused many casualties. Both navigation gear and one engine were also damaged.

After being patched up by our own ship's crew, we took on as many patients – some directly from the harbour by our launch and others brought from the shore – American sailors, some badly burnt, wharf labourers and Asian deck hands, as well as Australian soldiers.

We left Darwin on February 20 at 11.20 pm and 'limped' down to Fremantle. There the seriously wounded were sent to the military hospital. Workmen spent several days patching holes and repairing our cabins and making the ship seaworthy to get to Adelaide.

The patients left us at Adelaide and we had to pack up everything amidst a fiendish noise of sledge hammers and pneumatic drills (I know because I had to wear my army helmet as they were working on our lounge on the deck above and odd nuts and bolts somehow came down on my head as I was packing in my cabin).

Back on the ship again (August 16, 1942) I found that I had been given a ward on the deck above the one I had been on before. It was a nicer ward as it had windows instead of portholes and I could see what was happening outside.

Port Moresby and Milne Bay

Our first trip was to Port Moresby carrying men from the 2/9th Australian General Hospital. Our second trip was to Milne Bay, taking with us the 2/1st Casualty Clearing Station and their equipment.

We reached Milne Bay on Sunday September 6 and found there was a small ship, the *Anshun* already tied up at the wharf. As it was getting late it was decided not to start unloading equipment, so it was decided to move us further down the Bay.

Milne Bay is really a beautiful harbour. As Skipper, Captain Garner, had a big decision to make, whether we should be blacked out or stay alight with Red Cross showing. Our instructions had been – *In port without patients – no lights* (but this port already had the enemy attacking on the shore and we were unarmed). So in the end Captain Garner made the very wise decision and the lights were turned on.

I think the men ashore were not very happy at this decision – I heard all about it from the men at the 110 Casualty Clearing Station who I was working with in Queensland and on Tarakan Island (Borneo) later. They said our lights showed the Japanese where to fire. I'm sorry about that.

Air Raid

At 10 pm that night, before going to bed, we were having a cup of tea in the dining saloon when we heard what sounded to me like a lot of wooden cases being dropped on the deck. However soon after this the air raid alarm went and we realised it was a raid of some sort.

Having had such a lot of air raid alarms before, everyone quickly vanished to their stations – the Sisters mostly to their wards – with two orderlies. It was a bit different for me this time – we were told that there was a Japanese cruiser and destroyer in the harbour and we held our breath when the searchlights were shining on the walls of the ward.

I think our experience in the Suez Canal, when the Germans were dropping magnetic mines in the Canal to stop supplies getting to our troops in Greece, made us very fatalistic and we also had no idea how close we were to the Japanese ships – they had a very good look at us and left us alone. Eventually the All Clear signal sounded and we went to bed.

I stupidly went right to bed and when the alarm went again at about 2am I found the other Sisters had remained dressed and had gone to their stations – I felt very vulnerable and didn't waste any time scrambling into my uniform and getting down to my ward.

The sinking of the Anshun

Next day we found that the *Anshun* had been sunk, putting the wharf out of action and there were two hundred patients to be brought to the ship and the CCS equipment unloaded as quickly as possible.

Our orderlies and ship's staff had been very well drilled in the loading and carrying of stretchers – they worked very well. A number of the wounded had been caught by the gunfire during the night and were taken to

the theatre. Major Sturrock from the 2/1st CCS and our Major Ada were kept busy all day. In the meantime the CCS equipment went ashore on lighters that night.

We had another visit from the Japanese and more shelling of the shore and once again the searchlights examined us. It must have been rather frightening for the patients – I think it is much better if you have a job that keeps you busy than lying helpless in bed.

The unloading was finished next morning and new patients brought out to us. We had an air raid alarm during the morning. I believe the planes were strafing the airdrome. They were not interested in us.

We left Milne Bay on Tuesday September 8 and arrived in Port Moresby mid-morning next day and took on 169 new patients.

We arrived back in Brisbane on September 14 and disembarked 369 patients. We were given a couple of days leave and three of us went to Coolangatta where we were 'adopted' by an American and an Australian – they showed us the Tweed Valley and before we left Brisbane, gave us some things – I can't remember what, but there were some toothbrushes and paste to take back to Milne Bay.

(During the incident at Milne Bay Cec Rae had watched with bated breath thinking the brightly lit 'Manunda' might be sunk at any moment. Many men of 9 Battery were evacuated from Milne Bay on this hospital ship).

PHILLIP STOKES MEMORIAL PLANTATION

The 116th Light Anti-aircraft Regiment Association kindly let us have the following information on the Phillip Stokes Memorial Plantation named after our original 8th Battery Commander, then Major Phillip Stokes. Phil was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and then commanded 116th Regiment.

On the occasion of our 50th Anniversary on 27th September 1996, the Moonee Valley Council chose to name a medium strip plantation after former Maribyrnong Liberal MP Phillip Stokes. This was the culmination of requests made by Moonee Valley Council, local residents and our Association, and is a fitting tribute to Colonel Stokes who dedicated much of his life to serving his community and as Federal member for Maribyrnong from 1955 to 1969.

Representatives of our Association were privileged to be invited to attend the ceremony.

The plantation is on a 850-metre strip off Mount Alexander Road, between Shamrock and Leake Streets; it incorporates two rows of Canary Island date palms and is being listed on the Victorian Heritage register and is also considered a Municipal icon.

FROM LONDON TO HOME

The late Rol Tonkin (7) had this to say on his last days in the Army in 1945, after leaving Germany where he had been a POW (having been captured in Crete):-

Words still cannot describe our feelings of seeing and then touching Blighty after almost 4 years in captivity.

We were taken to a regular English barracks for the night, given £5 pocket money and the material to send a coded message to our next-of-kin, and made honorary members of the Sergeants' Mess. Next morning we awoke with heavy heads and happy hearts and still had the £5 in the pocket.

We were sent by train through London to Eastbourne on the south coast where the AIF Reception team had been waiting for us. We were set up with new uniforms and all other gear, medically and dentally checked, given new Pay Books and of course, PAY, then sent on leave in 2 days.

I met up with *Reg Thomson* in London on VE night May 8, 1945 and amongst other activities, danced the Hokey-Pokey with some British lassies.

A highlight of our stay in London was a day at Lords Cricket Ground as the guest of Sir Pelham (Plum) Warner, where we watched an Australian team captained by Lindsay Hassett play the *Rest* of the World.

Reg and I made contact with *Law Rolling* and *Kark Koska* again, and we left Liverpool on May 18 on the *Dominion Monarch* with quite a few Ack Troopers – in fact, *Bruce Tulloch* commanded a Bofors crew for a practice shoot on the way home. Our only stop was in the Panama Canal. We arrived back in Melbourne on June 18 to be met at Royal Park Reception Camp by our respective wives, families and/or girl friends. What a day! We were given leave, returned to Ballarat to bring us up to date with what was going on and to rid us of any barbed-wire happiness still in the system.

I think most of the boys on the *Dominion Monarch* were discharged by the end of July 1945 and so ended a page of history, part of which we could have done without, but the richer for the wonderful friendships made in Ack Troop, 7 Battery, 2/3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

LET'S DRINK TO OUR JOLLY GOOD HEALTH!

A professor was trying to illustrate to his class the effect of alcohol on the human body. First he put a worm in a glass of water. The worm crawled out none the worse. Then he put the worm in a glass of alcohol, and the worm died.

"Now," he asked the class, "what's the moral?"

Raising his hand, one of the students said, "If you drink alcohol, you'll never have worms."

RUN RABBIT RUN

Ian Rutter of 7 Battery has written an abbreviated history of his personal war, with the above title. We are privileged to have received a copy. His account is outstanding for brevity of writing style and the vividness of his descriptions. With Ian's permission, we are pleased to be able to publish a few extracts —

On Enlistment

War had been declared. What would it mean? For six months nothing seemed to happen and then came the blitzkrieg. The newspapers showed the German tarantula creeping across the map of Europe and the Maginot line which was thought to be impregnable crumbled quickly. This was when I joined the AIF but it made no appreciable difference to the course of events. I was to be paid five shillings a day and in return they would be allowed to boss me about.

I waited to be called up. At 22 you don't pry too much into the future. The present is all-important and it was exciting to see some escape from the boredom of banking. I moved away from the mustiness of ledger keeping into a glimmer of limelight. The Chief Clerk became quite approachable – the typist's eyes became softer. It was all very pleasant while it lasted.

I had to report at Caulfield Racecourse. The place was crawling with men all struggling to adapt to new identities. I was allotted a palliasse and a space on one of the grandstand steps and I looked around, straining to find a face I knew. How was it possible not to know even one of them? Suits were sent home to be mothballed for five years and apparitions in giggle dress were unleashed on Caulfield. Giggle dress wasn't meant to fit – it was a little creation designed to cover all shapes and sizes with the minimum of fuss.

We learned to peel potatoes and it caused some trauma in the streets of Caulfield when we donned gas masks during a route march. From here I was allocated a regiment, not as Colonel of course – and was transferred to another racetrack, this time at Werribee.

Here it was cold water shaving and endless standing about on parade while the officers chatted among themselves – all very boring. We played with make-believe guns and pretended we were getting somewhere. We were a Bofors Anti-aircraft Regiment with no Bofors. There were none in Australia. Boredom went on and on, only broken by regular weekend leave.

My war in Crete

The Bofors is a most mobile rapid firing gun. It can be brought in and out of action in a matter of minutes; that is its strength. It can change its position quickly. Ours was bolted down in concrete, completely immobilised, on the perimeter of the landing strip. It was effective up to two thousand feet which meant that bombers could come and go with impunity above that

range. As it turned out the air raids that developed were mostly by fighter planes strafing with machine guns. The Germans wanted to preserve the runway they were planning to use.

The first air attack

The first air raid came shortly after arrival. It was a lovely sunny morning. The Klaxon wailed. Red alert. There was a great drone out to sea and a moving black cloud appeared on the horizon. The drone got louder and we could distinguish planes. Then the roar as they separated into three formations. One came straight for us, the other two veered off each side behind the hills to strike from behind. A Bofors could fire about two shells a second. With the gun turning to meet planes diving from three different directions, empty red-hot shell cases were flying everywhere. After being in action for several minutes we could barely see the planes. A great pall of dust rose above the gun position. Nobody had realised that guns belching shells out at this rate would, on a bare airstrip, raise dust, blinding dust. Oil or something needed to be spread.

I don't know how long the attack lasted. Time is distorted when so much incident is pressed into each second. They came diving out of the sun, machine guns raking – and then they were climbing away, re-forming. It was over at last. We looked around at one another. We were all still there. All under control. It was a start.

This was to be the first raid of many. The Klaxon went five, six, seven times a day. Sometimes nothing happened. False Alarm.

An enemy bus driver?

One night, just as it was getting dark and we were leaving the gun, a German plane appeared from nowhere, swept over us machine-gunning from two or three hundred feet and screamed away, its pilot sitting up like a bus driver in his lighted cockpit. So close.

The lead up to the invasion lasted for about a month. From dawn to dark we were on the gun or in readiness nearby listening for the drone out to sea and the wail of the alert. Chaps were now arriving from Greece in a steady stream, looking the worse for wear. They had been bombed and strafed all the way over Greek mountains and passes by a German airforce that had no opposition. Nearly all their equipment had been left behind. Many still had their rifles but that was all.

Wireless transmitters had been lost and communication suffered. This loss was to play a big part in the fall of Crete. Our headquarters was back in the hills somewhere. Night and morning we had visits from officers and rations arrived on time, but it was a pretty remote relationship.

Without predictors it is difficult to hit a plane flying across the line of sight. The plane coming straight at you provided the best target. We should have had predictors to estimate trajectories but they only arrived a day before the invasion leaving no time to learn their operation. Consequently this valuable equipment was dumped in the slit trench and ruined. German planes crashed in the hills behind and, no doubt, some of the crashes resulted from anti-aircraft fire. If the local Cretans got to the crews first that was the end of them – they'd have their heads bashed in with stones.

Word came in that a huge air-borne attack was planned. We were visited by several well known war correspondents and an assortment of top brass – people we normally didn't have much to do with and we got the chilly feeling that things were about to happen. It seemed incredible that our tiny, desolate, little airstrip could be a focal point in a world war. A fatalistic calm settled – whatever would be would be. We went to bed and slept.

The Paratroopers attack

May 20 dawned bright and clear. Then the sirens wailed and wailed. Out of the clouds they came – Stuka dive-bombers and fighters concentrating on gun positions, and above, an armada of high level bombers and transport planes. The sky was alive. The attack was never ending. Then an amazing sight. The sky was full of white parachutes falling like confetti and gliders looking for landing spots. Paratroopers floated down through a barrage of rifle fire from ground troops determined that only dead Germans would land. Parachutes were strung up in trees with bulky, still figures suspended underneath. Planes were releasing more gliders full of troops. They came eerily down, crashing in trees and spilling their cargoes of men.

Our dominant worry was the fighter and dive-bomber. All the Bofors continued pumping out shells but one by one, on the exposed airfield, they were silenced. It was only much later that I learned that one gun crew had been completely wiped out, with the exception of one man, and two friends on another gun had been killed.

We abandoned the gun position and in the absence of any plan for this situation, separated, and in our ones and twos made independent plans. Two of us made for the hill dominating the airstrip which was held by New Zealanders – but what was between? What would I find – friend or enemy? It had better be a friend – I had no rifle, no defence.

The New Zealanders were a comparatively small force but, they held a strategic position. They could cover the airstrip and prevent any German planes landing. I was given a rifle; spares were lying about dropped by exhausted troops from Greece. The battle was very fluid. Nobody knew what to expect. The paratroops had landed in force just south of the airstrip and were consolidating. We watched them. They were making progress towards our position.

All that day the Stukas pounded the hill, diving with their curdling screams in a continuous circle. I was given a message for the Colonel at one point. He was directing operations from a high point three or four hundred yards away. I was fitted out with a bayonet and, hoping that any Germans nearby would take fright when they saw me, charged into the bushes and eventually reached the Colonel.

Little hope left

When night came both sides settled down exhausted. The New Zealanders had a listening post in advance of their main line. This was to give warning in the event of a surprise attack. A man had to slither quietly out to it and just lie still for an hour – listening. When it was my turn I slithered out. The Germans were so close I could hear them talking. Occasionally one would call out in English trying to get a response and pin-point the post. "That you Charlie?" he called. "How are you Charlie?" When my stint was over I crawled back and we all waited, looking at the stars as if for the first time. There was not much hope. There were lots of Germans out there, well armed, and not too many of us.

The night was wearing on and it was obvious there would be an early morning attack. The dark got a little paler as dawn approached and we prepared. Then the order came. We had to take off our boots and pick out our way almost through the German positions. We walked back about a mile and as the sun was breaking through, saw hundreds of our troops assembled on the side of the hill awaiting orders. We sat there for the whole of that day while the Germans flew in heavy artillery and motor cycle units landed on the captured airstrip. Then, when it was too late, we counter-attacked.

The Germans had machine guns in set positions to cover the attack spraying their fire in set arcs like garden hoses. As we charged through vulnerable points I saw a still, crumpled figure in the bushes – I'd spent many hours playing draughts with him in the Salvation Army hut back in Palestine.

From then on it was a rearguard. Little pockets of men falling back to hilltops and holding on until they were about to be encircled. Then falling back to the next hilltop.

Run Rabbit Run (continued)

A general evacuation was now under way. All over the island, troops were making their way to a beach on the south coast where the Navy was doing its best to get them off. It was too late for us. I linked up with a friend from our Bofors crew but the reunion was short lived. We were crawling shoulder to shoulder across an exposed position when he was hit. His legs didn't work anymore. I could only push him into a depression in the ground and wait for darkness. Then we got him back. Medical help was non-existent. A greatcoat with two rifles through the sleeves was an improvised stretcher. From then on there was no hope of keeping in front of the Germans.

At this point there were two of us carrying my wounded friend, with no ammunition and our rifles out of action. We were helpless. We struggled on aimlessly for some time, hoping for a miracle, but it didn't happen. We came over the bluff of a hill and in front of us, only yards away, was a German machine gun detachment and an officer with field glasses trained on one of our posts in the distance. We stood stock-still and waited until they saw us. The question, would they shoot us or take us prisoner. We were lucky. So began four years of life as a Prisoner of War.

THE POLISH MEDAL AND THE POLISH BRIGADE

Twenty or more years ago, the Polish Government decided to issue a medal to AIF fellows who fought alongside Polish troops in Tobruk. The Rats of Tobruk Association invited applications for the medal. Some of our men applied and a few received a very attractive medal. It seems that the Poles were not able to supply all applicants and it is unlikely that any more will be available to the Australian Rats of Tobruk.

On the topic of Polish troops in Tobruk, we are indebted to Dr W Gorski and the WA Rats of Tobruk Association for the following information:-

The Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade was formed, in April 1940 in French controlled Syria, from battle hardened elements of the Polish Army who eluded capture by leaving the country, via neutral Rumania and Hungary, in the aftermath of the German-Soviet invasion of Poland of September 1939.

In June 1941 the Brigade moved to Palestine to serve under British command and went on active service in the Western Desert. The Brigade, some 5,000 strong, comprised 3 infantry battalions, a regiment of field artillery, a regiment of Lancers, a battery of A/T artillery, sappers, signals, transport, medical and other services.

In August 1941 the Brigade was dispatched to Tobruk to relieve the 9th Division. It fought there for a

period of 110 days — until the end of the siege in December '41.

After the lifting of the siege, the Brigade took part in offensive operations, having fought a successful 2-day battle at Gazala (15/16 December '41) taking 1700 prisoners and a vast amount of ordnance. Participation in the taking of Bardia, the occupation duties in Cyrenaica, the rearguard action of the 8th Army and preparation of defensive positions in the Gazala sector, completed the Carpathian Brigade's 10-month tour of active service in the Western Desert.

The Brigade was then withdrawn to Palestine by which time its strength was down to about 3500, having lost 200 dead and nearly 500 wounded. Some hundreds were hospitalised after the privations of desert life. The Brigade won 34 Virtuti Militari Crosses, numerous Crosses of Valour as well as 25 British decorations.

An influx of reinforcements enabled the Brigade to be expanded to full divisional strength, becoming in March 1942, the Polish 3rd Carpathian Infantry Division — many Battle Honours were gained in the protracted Italian campaign; among them, the crucial role in the final, victorious assault on Monte Cassino and the capture of Ancona and Bologna.

After the war the Division was shipped to UK and disbanded in 1947. Many of its members came to Australia, settling predominantly in Tasmania, thereby drawing on the comradeship-in-arms forged with the Diggers in those perilous times.

*'Half of Mankind is done in
By alcohol and nicotine.
Yet the rest, enjoying neither,
Does not live much longer either.'*
Verse inscribed on a Salzburg village pub wall.



Clarrie Cuttris enjoys Harry Reid's yarn at the reunion.

A HAPPY GROUP ON THE 'Mauretania' ON DECEMBER 29, 1940



If you weren't in the group on the front page and you're not here — better luck next time!

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION

Each year, we ask for an annual subscription of \$5 from members of the Association who are not attending the Annual Reunion.

(Those attending the reunion pay their subscription which is included with the cost of lunch and drinks).

Our thanks go to all those who forwarded their \$5 contribution last year and for the many welcome accompanying letters.

A remittance slip for \$5 subscription is enclosed again for those members who will not be attending the Reunion.

CONTINUE THE PATTERN WHILE YOU MAY!

We hope to see you at the Reunion at noon on April 24 at 4 Cromwell Rd, South Yarra.

MURPHY'S LAW OF COMBAT OPERATIONS

Your are not Superman.
Keep it simple — stupid.
Incoming fire has right of way.
The easy way is always mined.
Automatic Weapons — aren't.
Recoilless weapons — aren't also.
If the enemy is in range, so are you.
When in doubt empty your magazine.
Don't look conspicuous, it draws fire.
If it's stupid and works, it isn't stupid.
If your attack is going well, its an ambush.
Your weapon is made by the lowest bidder.
No battleplan survives contact with the enemy.
Never draw fire, it irritates everyone around you.
Try not to look important, they might be low on ammo.
Anything you do can get you shot, including doing nothing.

Teamwork is essential, it gives them someone else to shoot at.

Make it tough for the enemy to get in and you won't be able to get out!

The only thing more accurate than enemy incoming fire is *friendly* incoming fire.



C Troop, 7 Battery, 2/3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment — at Melville, WA, July 1943



D Troop (Airborne), 8 Battery, 2/3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment — at Melville, WA, July 22, 1943